

Veterans' Healthy Living

VA NEW ENGLAND HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

FALL 2005

**Manage your
medications**

**Preparing
advance
directives**

**Help for
post-traumatic
stress disorder**

Important
information
about future
mailings—
see page 2



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Jeannette Chirico-Post, M.D.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began a yearlong observance of its 75th anniversary on July 21. The Veterans Administration was created on July 21, 1930, when President Herbert Hoover signed Executive Order 5398, "Consolidation and Coordination of Governmental Activities Affecting Veterans." On March 15, 1989, VA was elevated to a Cabinet-level agency, becoming the Department of Veterans Affairs. In this issue, you will read about some of VA's history.

The Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) study on the feasibility of consolidating the four Boston area medical centers into one tertiary care facility is underway. The purpose of the CARES study is to ensure that VA is offering the best health care services for veterans to meet their needs in the future. A Local Advisory Panel (LAP) was established by the VA Secretary to hold four public meetings on the delivery and location of services for veterans now treated at the West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain and Brockton campuses of the VA Boston Healthcare System and the Bedford VA Medical Center. The LAP held their first public meeting on May 13, in which the VA contractor, PricewaterhouseCoopers, presented the data and process for the study and gathered public input. A second public meeting was held on September 27, in which the contractor presented options for public comment and questions. Following public comment, the LAP made recommendations on which options to go forward for consideration by the VA Secretary, who will select the options for further analysis. The third LAP meeting will present the selected options and is expected to be held by the end of this year. Information about the Local Advisory Panel recommendations can be found on the CARES Web site at www.va.gov/cares. Final recommendations are expected to be presented to the VA Secretary by early to mid 2006.

I am pleased that Network 1 continues to be a national leader in performance. Data for the third quarter of fiscal year 2005 performance measures indicate that VISN 1 is ranked first among VISNs for performance measures. VISN 1 facilities attained at least a Fully Successful rating for 72 percent of the performance measures. Providing timely, compassionate, high-quality care for veterans throughout the VA New England Healthcare System is our highest priority. We remain committed to providing exceptional health care that improves the health and well-being of the veterans we so proudly serve.

This issue of *Veterans' Healthy Living* includes articles on post-traumatic stress disorder, medication safety, pharmacy benefits and advance directives. We also have included a comment card for you to provide feedback on specific health topics you would like to read about in future issues. Mail it back to us, and it will automatically be entered into a drawing for a \$50 VA Canteen gift certificate.

Sincerely,

Jeannette Chirico-Post, M.D.
Network Director

Attention, *Veterans' Healthy Living* readers

Expenses associated with the publication of *Veterans' Healthy Living* have gradually increased over the years. This is a result of the large volume of copies printed and the high cost of postage. While VISN 1 is committed to providing high-quality services to our veterans, we also recognize the need to identify opportunities for cost savings. Consequently, we will no longer mail individual issues of *Veterans' Healthy Living*. Printed copies of the newsletter are available at your local VA medical center or community-based outpatient clinic. *Veterans' Healthy Living* also is available on VISN 1's Web site at www.visn1.med.va.gov, where you can read articles from past and current issues. We hope you'll continue to enjoy our newsletter.

Publisher's regret: Dowden Health Media regrets that the comment card for use by readers to provide feedback was not included in the Winter 2004–2005 issue of *Veterans' Healthy Living*. They regret any confusion this omission has caused. A new comment card is included in this issue. The VA New England Healthcare System values feedback from its readers. Please take a few minutes to fill out the comment card in this issue and mail it back. Comment card results will be reported in a future issue.



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Visit us on the Web at
www.visn1.med.va.gov

A gift to loved ones

Advance directives make your health care wishes known

It's important to make decisions about your medical care while your health still allows you to do so—and to put those wishes in writing. Preparing advance directives while you're in good health will help those closest to you in the future.

"The advance directive process allows individuals to choose the actions they would like pursued at the end of life," said Corrine Smith, R.N., director, Geriatrics and Extended Care Service Line for the VA New England Healthcare System. "It's important to share this information with the individual who will be responsible for carrying out these wishes."

WHAT ARE ADVANCE DIRECTIVES?

Advance directives are written documents about your medical care choices. They come in two types: a **living will** or a **durable power of attorney for health care**. These instructions don't go into effect until you are no longer able to make decisions as a result of an injury or illness.

In a living will, you state your wishes about life-sustaining treatment and spell out specific measures you would choose or refuse. These include the use of breathing machines, feeding tubes and intravenous fluids. You may also list specific conditions and offer guidance about what types of care you would want if you have these illnesses.

A durable power of attorney for health care (sometimes called a health care proxy) appoints a family member or friend to make decisions about your care if you can't make treatment decisions for yourself.

GETTING STARTED

"As health care providers, we often have to deal with



patients and family members who struggle with making end-of-life choices at the wrong time," Smith said.

To prepare your advance directives, talk to your primary care provider or ask to see a social worker at your nearest VA medical center. He or she will explain the medical issues and treatment choices to consider. You'll then complete and sign your advance directives. Bring or mail copies of the documents to your health care provider at your VA medical center to be placed in your record. You may change your advance directives any time you wish.

Be sure to talk to your family, the person you appoint to make decisions if you sign a durable power of attorney for health care, and your doctors and treatment team about your advance directives and preferences.

Managing medications

Learn all you can about your prescriptions to protect your health

With so many things to remember when taking prescribed medications, it's not surprising many people don't take their medicines properly. The fact is, not taking prescription medicine correctly or not taking it at all can be dangerous.

Prescription and over-the-counter drugs often provide effective relief but can also pose some risks. Mixing incompatible drugs or taking too much of a drug may cause adverse reactions. Some people experience side effects that feel worse than their original condition.

JOIN YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

Doctors and pharmacists may offer patients standard, printed medication instructions and information, but many times patients are still left with questions about why a drug is needed, how to take it and how to minimize side effects. That's why it's important to leave your doctor's office with a clear understanding about your prescription.



ARE GENERIC DRUGS AS EFFECTIVE AS BRAND-NAME DRUGS?

Yes. Generic drugs have the same active ingredients, dosage, strength and safety as their brand-name counterparts. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration holds all

generic drugs up to the same rigorous standards as brand-name drugs. The only major difference is generic drugs can be sold at a lower cost since generic drug makers aren't shouldered with the same investment costs associated with those of new drugs.

Always check with your provider before taking a generic drug, though, since minor differences in the drug's inactive ingredients could have adverse effects.



Patients who learn as much as they can about their condition find it easier to stick to their treatment plan. Talk to your doctor. The more comfortable you feel with your doctor and the more solid your relationship, the more likely you'll follow his or her orders.

PLAY IT SAFE

Take these simple prescription precautions to avoid unwelcome surprises:

- Make sure your physician is aware of all the medications you're taking, including over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and supplements.
- Ask your doctor and pharmacist to tell you exactly how and when to take your medications and what side effects to expect, if any.
- Keep your own drug diary to bring with you and update on doctors' visits. Include dosage amounts, when and how you take your medications and what side effects you've experienced.
- Read the labels before taking over-the-counter drugs.
- Check the labels on your pharmacy prescriptions to be sure they're exactly what the doctor ordered.
- Never share prescriptions.

What you need to know about VA prescriptions

Sampath Narayana, R.Ph., VISN 1 Pharmacy Benefits Manager

1. What is the co-pay for pharmacy benefits?

A. Prescriptions for nonservice-connected conditions are \$7 a prescription up to 30 days. For a 90-day medication supply, the co-pay would be \$21 (\$7 x three months).

2. How can I find out what prescription benefits I'm entitled to?

A. Call your local VA facility to speak with an Eligibility Representative.

3. What is a formulary?

A. It's a comprehensive list of medications that VA pays for. This list of more than 1,200 drug classes treats a variety of conditions. If your current medication isn't on the formulary, your VA health care provider will prescribe a medically identical alternative. Under certain conditions, your VA provider may prescribe a drug not on the formulary by completing a special request form.

The Network 1 Formulary is available on VISN 1's Web site at www.visn1.med.va.gov/formulary.

4. Can I get prescriptions from my private physician filled at a VA pharmacy?

A. No. A VA health care provider must treat you. Your VA provider will work closely with your private physician to provide you with continuity of care. Be sure to give your VA provider your complete medical records.

5. Will VA pay for a prescription filled at a non-VA pharmacy?

A. No. You or your private insurance company is responsible for these costs.

6. How do I get my medications?

A. You can pick up new prescriptions at the VA pharmacy or have them mailed to you. Mailed prescriptions usually arrive within 14 days.

7. How do I get refills?

A. You can request prescription refills through any of these ways:

- using a touch-tone phone to call our automated refill request system
- completing and mailing the refill request slip that comes with each prescription
- leaving the refill slip in the pharmacy drop box the next time you come to VA
- visiting My Health@Vet's Web site at www.myhealth.va.gov

Please request refills at least three weeks before you run out of medication. To refill your medication by phone, call your nearest VA facility:

Bedford: **1 (800) 422-1617 or 1 (781) 687-2000**

Boston: **1 (800) 865-3384**

Connecticut: **1 (203) 932-5711 (West Haven) or 1 (860) 667-6750 (Newington)**

Manchester: **1 (800) 892-8384 or 1 (603) 624-4366**

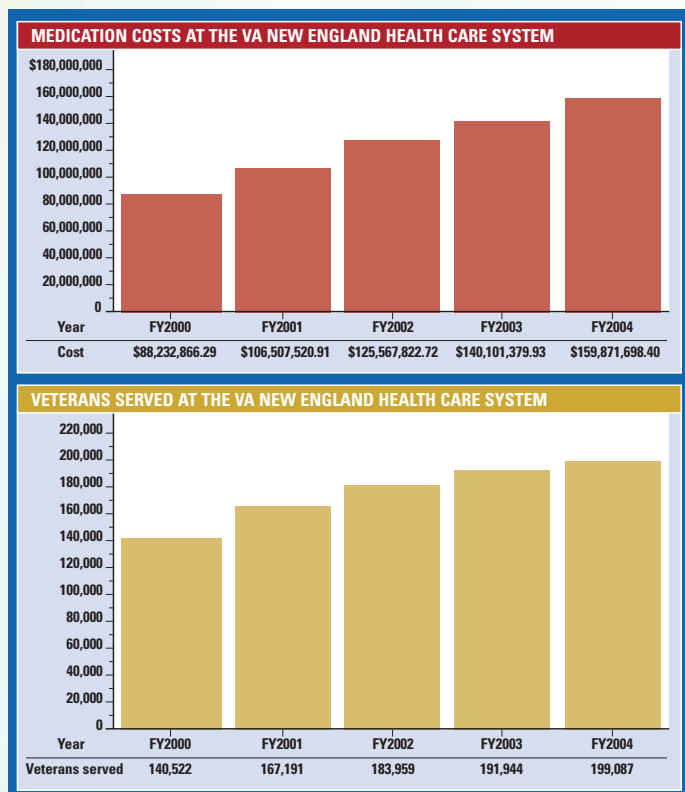
Northampton: **1 (800) 893-1522 or 1 (413) 582-3189**

Providence: **1 (401) 272-7100 or 1 (401) 457-3396**

Togus: **1 (877) 421-8263 or 1 (207) 623-5770**

White River Junction: **1 (802) 295-9363 or 1 (866) 687-8387**

◀ **CHARTS AT LEFT:** The number of veterans seeking medications through the VA health care system has increased by 30 percent since 2000. By maintaining an effective formulary and low medication costs, the VA New England Health Care System has been able to serve more veterans than ever before.



Helping your loved one overcome post-traumatic stress disorder

When your loved one returns from combat in Afghanistan or Iraq, he or she may need more than a hearty hug and home-cooked meal. About 20 percent of veterans will come home suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). You can help your loved one by learning to recognize PTSD symptoms and helping him or her get the right treatment early.

LEARN THE SYMPTOMS

“It’s not unusual for newly returned veterans to struggle with emotional issues as they adjust back to civilian life,” said Terence Keane, Ph.D., director, National Center for PTSD, Behavioral Sciences Division, and associate chief of staff for Research and Development, VA Boston

Healthcare System. “But when PTSD symptoms begin to interfere with family or social life, employment or education, intervention becomes necessary.”

Signs of PTSD include:

- nightmares, upsetting flashbacks or frightening thoughts
- social withdrawal
- depression, anxiety or guilt
- angry outbursts and inappropriate rage
- trouble sleeping
- nervousness
- problems concentrating
- use of drugs or alcohol

GET THE RIGHT TREATMENT

“Our brave men and women continue to show how strong they are by taking care of themselves and their families when they get home, including getting mental



health treatment,” said Jillian Shipherd, Ph.D., clinical research psychologist, National Center for PTSD, Women’s Health Sciences Division, VA Boston Healthcare System. One treatment option is **educational classes**, which often include family members. **Group therapy** is another useful tool, where your loved one can learn to cope with PTSD symptoms while getting support from peers who are going through similar experiences.

One-on-one counseling can also be effective. Here, your loved one will learn to confront what has happened to him or her and use behavioral skills to cope with anxiety, stress and anger. If he or she has turned to drugs or alcohol,

substance abuse counselors are available.

“Having the love and support of family and friends is important,” said Dr. Shipherd. “Encouraging your loved one to get treatment can help him or her live a happy and fulfilling life again.”



CALL US!

If your loved one is showing signs of PTSD, don’t wait to get help. Contact your local VA medical center or call VA’s 24-hour help line at **1 (888) 838-6446**.

In Boston, the National Center for PTSD has two internationally recognized treatment centers. Male veterans should contact the Behavioral Sciences Division at **(617) 232-9500, ext. 44143**. Female veterans should contact the Women’s Health Sciences Division at **(617) 232-9500, ext. 45906**.



Commemorating 75 Years of Service

Celebrating 75 years of service to America's heroes

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Here's a look back at how VA has kept pace with veterans' changing needs:

- **\$786 million:** budget for VA's first fiscal year
- **\$65 billion:** budget for VA's 75th year
- **25 million:** current number of veterans in the U.S. population
- **5 million:** current number of veterans enrolled in the VA health care system
- **157:** current number of VA medical centers
- **862:** current number of VA outpatient clinics that bring home health care to veterans:
- **207:** current number of Vet Centers that counsel and support veterans of all wars

VA will celebrate its diamond jubilee anniversary through July 20, 2006. Learn more at www.75anniversary.va.gov/.

Special VA health care eligibility for combat veterans

VA provides free health care to combat veterans for conditions related to combat service for two years beginning on their last day of active military service. You're eligible for these services if you served in combat operations after the Gulf War or against a hostile force after November 11, 1998, and you were discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.



For more information, visit any VA medical facility. You can also call the Health Benefit Service Center at (1) 877-222-8387, call toll-free at 1 (800) 827-1000 or visit the VA health benefits Web site at www.va.gov/healtheligibility/home/hecmmain.asp.



Somersworth CBOC opens

A community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) in Somersworth, N.H., opened on June 16. The CBOC provides primary care, nutrition, mental health and lab services. The CBOC was previously located in Wolfeboro, N.H. Shown above celebrating the opening are (from left) Michael Mayo-Smith, M.D., director, VISN 1 Primary Care Service Line; Susan Kimmey, R.D., associate director, Manchester VA Medical Center; Marc Levenson, M.D., director, Manchester VA Medical Center; and Jeb Bradley, U.S. representative, N.H. (Photo by Jim Thompson)

PLEASE ... Don't be a "No Show"

We need **your help** to reduce "no shows."

Next time you can't make your health care appointment, call and let us know as soon as possible. This will help us maximize productivity, improve access to services and ensure the best possible scheduling practices.

Here is how you can help:

- ✓ If you cannot keep your scheduled appointment, **always call** to cancel as soon as possible. This will allow us to offer that appointment to another veteran!
- ✓ **Please inform us** of changes in your address or phone number.
- ✓ **Understand the impact** of no shows on VISN 1 resources.

Thanks for your help!

Veterans' Healthy Living

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Where to find us



VA MEDICAL CENTERS

CONNECTICUT

VA CT HEALTHCARE SYSTEM
Newington Campus
555 Willard Avenue
Newington, CT 06111
(860) 666-6951

West Haven Campus
950 Campbell Avenue
West Haven, CT 06516
(203) 932-5711

MAINE

Togus VAMC
1 VA Center
Augusta, ME 04330
(207) 623-8411
(within the Augusta area)
(877) 421-8263
(outside the Augusta area)

MASSACHUSETTS

EDITH NOURSE ROGERS
VETERANS MEMORIAL
HOSPITAL
200 Springs Road
Bedford, MA 01730
(781) 275-7500

VA BOSTON HEALTHCARE
SYSTEM
Brockton Campus
940 Belmont Street
Brockton, MA 02301
(508) 583-4500

Jamaica Plain Campus
150 South Huntington
Avenue

Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
(617) 232-9500

West Roxbury Campus
1400 VFW Parkway
West Roxbury, MA 02132
(617) 323-7700

NORTHAMPTON VAMC
421 North Main Street
Leeds, MA 01053
(413) 584-4040

NEW HAMPSHIRE

MANCHESTER VAMC
718 Smyth Road
Manchester, NH 03104
(603) 624-4366
(800) 892-8384

RHODE ISLAND

PROVIDENCE VAMC
830 Chalkstone Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
(401) 273-7100
(877) 417-9421

VERMONT

WHITE RIVER JUNCTION
VAM&ROC
215 North Main Street
White River Junction,
VT 05009
(802) 295-9363

COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS

CONNECTICUT

DANBURY
7 Germantown Road
Danbury, CT 06320
(203) 798-8422

NEW LONDON CBOC
15 Mohegan Avenue
New London, CT 06320
(860) 437-3611

STAMFORD CBOC
90 Morgan Street
Stamford, CT 06924
(203) 325-0649

WATERBURY CBOC
133 Scovill Street
Waterbury, CT 06706
(203) 465-5292

WINDHAM CBOC
96 Mansfield Street
Willimantic, CT 06226
(860) 450-7583

WINSTED CBOC
115 Spencer Street
Winsted, CT 06098
(860) 738-6985

MAINE

BANGOR CBOC
304 Hancock Street,
Suite 3B
Bangor, ME 04401
(207) 561-3600

CALAIS CBOC
18 Palmer Street
Calais, ME 04619
(207) 454-7849

CARIBOU CBOC
163 Van Buren Road,
Suite 6
Caribou, ME 04736
(207) 498-8785

RUMFORD CBOC
431 Franklin Street
Rumford, ME 04276
(207) 369-3200

SACO CBOC
655 Main Street
Saco, ME 04072
(207) 294-3100

MASSACHUSETTS
CAUSEWAY STREET CBOC
251 Causeway Street
Boston, MA 02130
(617) 248-1000

DORCHESTER
895 Blue Hill Avenue
Dorchester, MA 02121
(617) 822-7146

FITCHBURG CBOC
275 Nichols Road
Fitchburg, MA 01420
(978) 342-9781

FRAMINGHAM CBOC
61 Lincoln Street, Suite 112
Framingham, MA 01702
(508) 628-0205

FRANKLIN COUNTY CBOC
51 Sanderson Street
Greenfield, MA 01301
(413) 773-8428

GLOUCESTER CBOC
298 Washington Street
Gloucester, MA 01930
(978) 282-0676

HAVERHILL CBOC
108 Merrimack Street
Haverhill, MA 01830
(978) 372-5207

HYANNIS CBOC
145 Falmouth Road
Hyannis, MA 02601
(508) 771-3190

LOWELL CBOC
130 Marshall Road
Lowell, MA 01852
(978) 671-9000

LYNN CBOC
225 Boston Street, Suite 107
Lynn, MA 01904
(781) 595-9818

NEW BEDFORD CBOC
174 Elm Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
(508) 994-0217

PITTSFIELD CBOC
73 Eagle Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201
(413) 443-4857

QUINCY CBOC
114 Whitwell Street
Quincy, MA 02169
(617) 376-2010

SPRINGFIELD CBOC
25 Bond Street
Springfield, MA 01104
(413) 731-6000

WORCESTER CBOC
605 Lincoln Street
Worcester, MA 01605
(508) 856-0104

NEW HAMPSHIRE
CONWAY CBOC
7 Greenwood Avenue
Conway, NH 03818
(603) 447-2555

LITTLETON CBOC
600 St. Johnsbury Road
Littleton, NH 03561
(603) 444-9328

PORTSMOUTH CBOC
302 Newmarket Street,
Building 15
Portsmouth, NH 03803
(603) 624-4366, ext. 5500
(800) 892-8384, ext. 5500

SOMERSWORTH CBOC
200 Route 108
Somersworth, NH 03878
(603) 624-4366, ext. 5700
(800) 892-8384, ext. 5700

TILTON CBOC
139 Winter Street
Tilton, NH 03276
(603) 624-4366, ext. 5600
(800) 892-8384, ext. 5600

RHODE ISLAND

MIDDLETOWN CBOC
One Corporate Place
Middletown, RI 02842
(401) 847-6239

VERMONT

BENNINGTON CBOC
325 North Street
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 447-6913

COLCHESTER CBOC
162 Hegeman Avenue,
Unit 100
Colchester, VT 05444
(802) 655-1356

RUTLAND CBOC
215 Stratton Road
Rutland, VT 05702
(802) 773-3386

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